

# Chapter 1

## Introduction and Overview

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction and Overview

### Chapter Overview

This chapter provides an overview of the State Wildlife Action Plan Update (SWAP or Plan). It includes discussion on the background and purpose of the plan, how this update differs from the first version completed in 2005, and reviews the key components.

### Background and Purpose

Washington's State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) is a comprehensive plan for conserving the state's fish and wildlife and the natural habitats on which they depend. It is part of a nationwide effort by all 50 states and 5 U.S. territories to develop conservation action plans and participate in the State and Tribal Wildlife Grants (SWG) Program. The purpose of the SWG Program is to support state actions that broadly benefit wildlife and habitats, but particularly "Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN)" as identified by each individual state.

Washington's first plan was completed in 2005 and was called the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy or CWCS. The CWCS has since become known as the State Wildlife Action Plan. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) requires these plans be updated every 10 years in order to remain eligible for State Wildlife Grants funding. This document represents Washington's 2015 update. It assesses the status of the state's wildlife and habitats, identifies key problems they face, and outlines the actions needed to conserve them over the long term. A guiding principle of the SWAP planning process is to identify actions needed to conserve wildlife and their habitats before species become too rare and restoration efforts too costly. Our intent is that the SWAP serves to inform conservation priorities and actions statewide, and provide tools and informational resources to support collaborative conservation initiatives across a range of organizations and entities.

### Eight Essential Elements

Congress established eight elements that were required to be addressed for approval of the original CWCS. The USFWS subsequently developed policy regarding what constitutes a major or a minor revision to the plan. During the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's (WDFW) required review of the 2005 CWCS, it was determined that sufficient changes to the plan (including changes to Washington's Species of Greatest Conservation Need list) would be proposed, thus meeting the definition for a major revision. This required WDFW to ensure that all eight elements were addressed during the review and revision process.

<b>Element 1</b>	Identify distribution, abundance and status of species of greatest conservation need
<b>Element 2</b>	Identify condition of key habitats types essential to the conservation of SGCN.
<b>Element 3</b>	Identify problems and threats that affect SGCN and their habitats.
<b>Element 4</b>	Determine and prioritize actions to conserve SGCN and their habitats.
<b>Element 5</b>	Provide for periodic monitoring and adaptive management of SGCN and their habitats
<b>Element 6</b>	Provide for review and revision of the State Wildlife Action Plan.
<b>Element 7</b>	Coordinate development and revision with appropriate federal, state, local agencies and tribes.
<b>Element 8</b>	Provide for necessary public involvement in the development, revision, and implementation of the SWAP.

## Guiding Principles

WDFW established an interagency team early in the action plan revision process to ensure that the revised Plan would be useful and relevant across the agency and to our conservation partners. The interagency team reviewed the strengths and weaknesses of the 2005 CWCS as a first order of business, identifying what worked well, what aspects could be improved, and areas that needed significant updating. The team determined that it would be helpful at the start of the revision process to outline the intended use of the product, in the interests of developing a SWAP that would deliver maximum benefit.

The team established a set of guiding principles as a way to be explicit about our goals for the State Wildlife Action Plan (see Figure 1). After internal review, these principles were then introduced to, and approved by the Wildlife Diversity Advisory Council, a committee convened by WDFW to advise the agency on a number of issues related to managing at risk species in the state. More information about the engagement of the Wildlife Diversity Advisory Council can be found in Appendix D – Outreach.

## Audience

One of the most important outcomes of the interagency team’s review of the CWCS, which is codified in the guiding principles, was to clarify that the primary audience for the State Wildlife Action Plan is WDFW. The previous CWCS was developed and written to address a broadly defined conservation community across Washington. While we fully recognize that conservation is a collaborative endeavor, and that engaging conservation partners is critical, we learned that implementation becomes more difficult if the primary audience or owner of the plan is not clearly identified. For these reasons, and because we wanted to advance implementation and use of the products developed through the SWAP, we were explicit that WDFW is the primary audience, with the recognition that the document will also be useful to the full breadth of our conservation partners. Chapter 7 - Implementation, discusses opportunities for others outside the agency to benefit from a number of the products created through the SWAP. Where appropriate, some of the actions that have been identified in the species Fact Sheets have WDFW identified as the likely owner of that action, whereas conservation partners are suggested as likely resources for addressing other actions. It is our hope that these products will advance our collective understanding of conservation needs across the state, and contribute to our effectiveness at addressing them.

## A Word about Prioritization

The actions needed to address the conservation issues for the 268 Species of Greatest Conservation Need and 28 Ecological Systems of Concern outlined in this document are significant, from population assessment and inventory, to habitat protection, acquisition, and restoration. It is clear that WDFW does

Figure 1

### Guiding Principles 2015 State Wildlife Action Plan

1. Design the State Wildlife Action Plan to guide WDFW conservation planning. It should also serve to inform and benefit conservation partners to advance conservation priorities.
2. Focus Species of Greatest Conservation Need on *biological* conservation needs; address *socioeconomic* factors in prioritization.
3. Recognize the importance of ecosystem based management in accomplishing conservation.
4. Include Cross Program expertise and perspective. The SWAP will aim for a final product that is consistent and relevant to agency values.
5. Engage conservation partners. A goal is to use the SWAP to facilitate collaborative conservation, including cross-state and regional approaches.
6. Create a document that is concise, readable, informative and available to a wide range of publics and stakeholders.
7. Be Efficient. Conduct the SWAP revision in a manner that matches available resources for planning and implementation.

not have the financial capacity to adequately address all of these needs, and that we must prioritize where to invest; in which species, landscapes, or conservation tools. We also recognize that the criteria by which we prioritize investment will change depending on the specific funding source, the specific conservation partners involved, or other factors. Consequently, WDFW has adopted a flexible approach to prioritization in the SWAP, one that allows the agency to prioritize conservation activity in response to changes in internal priorities, organizational capacity, targeted funding opportunities, or the availability of other resources. In 2014 we developed a prioritization matrix (see Chapter 7 and also Appendix E), which includes a range of factors and criteria for determining priority for implementation. Our SGCN list is larger than in 2005, in part because of an explicit recognition that, while the agency doesn't currently have capacity to adequately fund the conservation actions for all SGCN identified, other resources may become available or conservation partners may be able to address those needs. Thus, inclusion of a species as an SGCN or inclusion of an ecological system as an ecological system of concern doesn't necessarily imply WDFW will initiate action; rather that the need for conservation action exists and that we will work collaboratively with our partners to address unmet needs as capacity allows.

## Engaging Conservation Partners

Input and feedback from our conservation partners was solicited early in the SWAP update process, through email announcements, surveys, workshops, and webinars. Our interest was to determine how the SWAP could be developed in such a way as to contribute to the shared goals of conservation partners and others. Appendix D includes a full discussion of our outreach plan, specific activities, and results.

## How the 2015 SWAP Differs from the 2005 CWCS

While we drew extensively from the products created for the CWCS, we recognized that the last ten years have brought significant changes in terms of data availability, updated tools and new methodologies, as well as shifts in the landscape of conservation partners and priorities. These new developments, combined with our interests in developing a document more clearly focused on implementation, made it clear that we needed to develop a new document, rather than simply editing the 2005 CWCS. However in doing so we also committed to using as much information as possible from the previous edition.

Another notable shift in the last ten years has been a rapidly growing body of research focused on understanding the impacts that a changing climate may have on the distribution and health of our fish and wildlife resources. Chapter 5 includes a full discussion of how climate change is expected to affect the Species of Greatest Conservation Need and the habitats on which they depend. Appendix C includes additional material to support the climate change information presented in Chapter 5.

The table below highlights key differences between the two documents.

What Changed	Rationale	Implications for the 2015 SWAP
<p><b>SGCN Criteria:</b> The criteria for inclusion as a Species of Greatest Conservation Need was modified from 2005.</p> <p>Modifications included using NatureServe ranks as a criterion, based in part on the guidance document, "Best Practices for State Wildlife Action Plans" produced by</p>	<p><b>Increased Transparency:</b> The criteria used in 2005 was unnecessarily complicated and proved difficult to easily explain to a non-technical audience. We simplified the criteria to address only biological conservation need, with the understanding that socioeconomic needs would be addressed in prioritization processes. The use of</p>	<p><b>Larger SGCN list:</b> The SGCN list is almost 30 percent larger than in 2005 (from 186 to 268). This number reflects a much larger number of invertebrates and fishes, as well as updated information for the other taxa.</p>

What Changed	Rationale	Implications for the 2015 SWAP
AFWA <sup>1</sup> .	the NatureServe ranks was recommended in the AFWA Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Best Practices guide.	
<b>Habitat Classification:</b> Habitats were classified and described differently; we adopted the National Vegetation Classification System (NVC) to represent habitat needs for SGCN.	<b>Standardized and Mappable:</b> Ecological systems (part of the NVC) are mapped across the west. Use of ecological systems to describe habitat provides an important spatial component to the SWAP, allowing us to translate conservation priorities to specific landscapes.	<b>Chapter 4</b> in the SWAP addresses Habitats of Greatest Conservation Need and this is entirely new material.
<b>Defining Stressors and Actions:</b> Based in part on the Best Practices for State Wildlife Plans document (AFWA 2012), we adopted a nationally accepted lexicon for defining threats and actions (TRACS).	We selected the Wildlife TRACS system of classification which was not available in 2005. TRACS is the tracking and reporting system for conservation and related actions funded by the USFWS.	When stressors and actions are discussed in the SWAP, they are described by TRACS categories. This change will facilitate our ability to identify projects appropriate for funding through SWG.
<b>Range and Habitat Distribution Maps:</b> These maps are included for a subset of the SGCN for which we had sufficient data.	The CWCS did not include spatial representation of range and distribution for SGCN.	Appendix B includes range and potential habitat distribution maps for SGCN.
<b>Agency-wide Participation:</b> Increased engagement by the WDFW Fish and Habitat programs resulted in a more robust SGCN fish and invertebrate lists and also ensured relevancy to the entire agency.	The WDFW Conservation Initiative, adopted in 2012, emphasizes the importance of cross-program engagement in key initiatives.	The SGCN list is larger, there is greater awareness of SWAP across the agency, and there are increased opportunities for implementation.
<b>Climate Change:</b> Other than being identified as a threat, climate change was not discussed in the 2005 CWCS.	The last ten years have brought a growing recognition of the emerging threat that climate change poses to our fish and wildlife and the need to build our understanding regarding specific risks and vulnerabilities.	Chapter 5 discusses projected impacts and introduces a list of species and habitats most at risk from climate change. Appendix C includes the full assessment of climate vulnerability for all SGCN.

<sup>1</sup> Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies. November, 2012. Best Practices for State Wildlife Action Plans, Voluntary Guidance for States for Revision and Implementation.

## **Document Overview**

### **Chapter 2 – State Overview**

Chapter 2 provides background information on the biological and physiographical characteristics of the state and discusses the distribution of fish and wildlife resources across the state. It also provides an overview of the primary stressors and challenges for fish and wildlife, and outlines the state framework for addressing them.

### **Chapter 3 – Species of Greatest Conservation Need**

Chapter 3 reviews the Species of Greatest Conservation Need. It describes the criteria and process used to identify the revised list and describes differences from 2005, including a list of species that dropped off the list and why. Summaries of the conservation status and concerns for all of the SGCN are presented in taxonomic groups; mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians, fish, and invertebrates. Each of the SGCN also has an associated fact sheet which provides more detail on habitat needs, distribution, and conservation threats and actions. These fact sheets can be found in Appendix A.

### **Chapter 4 – Habitats of Greatest Conservation Need**

Chapter 4 discusses Habitats of Greatest Conservation Need. In this section, we have used the National Vegetation Classification to describe habitats important to SGCN, using two levels of the NVC hierarchy; vegetation formations and ecological systems. We describe threats generally for each major habitat in the entire state (using vegetation formations) and then focus on those ecological systems considered most imperiled (Ecological Systems of Concern). Fact sheets for each of the ecological systems of concern include a description, lists of SGCN for which this is a crucial habitat, key stressors, and actions needed.

### **Chapter 5 – Climate Change: Which species and habitats are most at risk?**

In Chapter 5 we provide a summary of how climate change may affect the SGCN and the habitats on which they depend. We also highlight the summary findings from an analysis assessing the relative vulnerability to climate change of all of our SGCN, and our ecological systems of concern. From this analysis we identified a Climate Watch List – those species most at risk because of climate change effects. These species and the reasons why they are more sensitive to climatic change are outlined in Chapter 5. Additional detail from this analysis is provided in Appendix C.

### **Chapter 6 – Monitoring and Adaptive Management**

In this chapter we discuss the agency's commitment to monitoring and adaptive management and profile a couple of examples. We focus on population assessment monitoring, and compliance or effectiveness monitoring.

### **Chapter 7 – Implementation**

Chapter 7 considers specific products, either prepared in support of the SWAP or part of the SWAP itself, and discusses how they can inform activities and initiatives, both internal and external to the agency. We also outline future needs to fully implement the SWAP.

### **Appendix A – SGCN Fact Sheets**

A1 – Fact sheets for SGCN Mammals

A2 – Fact sheets for SGCN Birds

A3 – Fact sheets for SGCN Reptiles and Amphibians

A4 – Fact sheets for SGCN Fishes

A5 – Fact sheets for SGCN Invertebrates

**Appendix B – Range and Potential Habitat Distribution Maps**

Range and potential habitat distribution maps for selected SGCN are presented in Appendix B, as well as a description of methodology and considerations for use.

**Appendix C – Climate Change Background Information**

This appendix includes supporting information regarding the climate change findings presented in Chapter 5.

**Appendix D – Outreach**

Appendix D contains a description of public and stakeholder outreach in the development of the SWAP.

**Appendix E – Prioritization Matrix**

This appendix is a matrix that allows for the prioritization of conservation actions